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ABSTRACT

This digest discusses the importance of marketing in the field of career planning and placement. It explains the use of marketing techniques in counseling and the human services, lists major relevant marketing concepts, and provides a marketing list for career planning and placement counselors. (NB)

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HIGHLIGHTS

...An ERIC/CAPS Digest

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Marketeer: New Role for Career and Placement Specialists

Introduction

Though several attitudes toward advertising and marketing have changed remarkably in recent years, and even a bastion of professional respectability such as the American Bar Association is on record as favoring discrete marketing by its members, resistance to marketing by the helping professions persists.

CP&P center staffs are often hesitant to employ marketing principles and practices in their program development strategies for three specific reasons. First, they may adjudge marketing to smack of crass commercialism. Secondly, they may perceive marketing as unnecessary. Third, they may consider marketing to be proper and probably necessary, but optimistic expectations of what it can accomplish are seldom, if ever, realized in actual practice so it becomes unworthy of any major effort.

All of the aforementioned beliefs are frequently the result of actual experiences that have confirmed for a staff the undesirability of undertaking any major marketing initiatives. These limited experiences, however, should not blind us to both the desirability and the achievability of CP&P centers' designing and installing effective marketing programs. The benefits far outweigh the negatives. And the consequences of ignoring the marketing imperative can be diminished impact, with eventual program stagnation. The difficulties that people experience are not inherent in marketing, but result from faulty conceptualization and implementation. Given an appropriate perspective and reasonable amounts of energy, commitment and skill, a CP&P center can have a useful and self-justifying marketing system.

A center probably can't spend its way to a good marketing program—although many do try, and one needs only modest resources to achieve many marketing goals.

Definition of Marketing

A functional definition of *human services* marketing reads as follows:

> Marketing in a human services setting should be targeted to increasing clients' awareness of critical needs and choices and assisting them to make informed decisions and plans with particular reference to how a given service, e.g., career planning and placement center, can be helpful.

Two basic tenets underlie the above view of marketing. First, we are born into and live and die in a world where marketing is omnipresent. A service which is not promoted may not even be considered for adoption and/or use because of ignorance of its availability.

Second, marketing cannot make a success of a poor product or service. As a general rule, it can be said that quality wins out in the marketplace.

Much of what can be described as marketing is appropriate to CP&P centers and there are basic concepts in marketing which deserve greater attention and interest from career planning and placement specialists.

Product and Service Life Cycle

Basic to marketing is the concept that every product or service progresses through a predictable life cycle of introduction to abandonment. Regardless of the length of the life cycle, the stages are the same:

Stage One: Introduction. In this stage, the product is new and has few competitors. The role of marketing at this point is to build demand by informing potential users of the existence of the product or service.

Stage Two: Growth. In the growth stage, there is a shift from building mass demand for the product by showing that it exists to stimulating selective demand, i.e., identifying and communicating why a given product or service is best and will effectively meet a user's need and interest.

Stage Three: Maturity. In this stage, the competition becomes very strong. The sale and/or use of one product or service is usually won at the expense of another as the overall level of sales is stabilized. It becomes important to stimulate further response to the product or service by identifying new uses for it.

Stage Four: Decline. In the decline stage, there is a reduction in the use of the product or service. However, the costs remain high because of the intense competitive effort that is still required. The key decision at this point is whether or not to abandon the product or service.

If CP&P centers adopt the life cycle concept in their view of products and services, they must respond to two specific challenges. First, it is apparent that each life cycle stage requires a different marketing strategy. Second, it is extremely important to find new products or services that will replace those which are in a declining stage and must be redeveloped or dropped.

These two challenges are very relevant to the state of CP&P as we know it today. In many areas, CP&P is in a maturity stage, even approaching a decline, e.g., employers are taking on the placement function themselves because of their dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the existing services. The point is that career counseling and placement services may be in different life cycle stages. Therefore, we must identify the particular

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stage that each service is in and then develop an appropriate and relevant marketing strategy for it.

The Use of Marketing Concepts in Counseling and the Human Services

As broad social changes take place, it is important that counseling services be able to respond to these societal demands. We may either do this in a proactive way, demonstrating our viability and desire to meet people's needs and interests, or ignore the life cycles of our products and services, thereby risking abandonment and extinction because of declining usage. Several developments are placing the human services in an increasingly competitive and vulnerable position:

- Self-help books
- Self-help networks
- Entry of other helping services into areas previously served by counselors
- Availability of computer and other technologically based helping services

The future is likely to see a great increase in the number of self-help and personal growth programs which provide the client with the opportunity for "comparison shopping" before deciding where to obtain help.

A useful way to visualize marketing potentialities and strategies is to think about services and users in four different ways:

1. *Old services, old users.* The traditional approach, it says in effect, "Stay with what you know best, do what you have been successful doing in the past."
2. *New services, old users.* The next safest approach, with the risk in bringing out new services minimized because of the knowledge of the users.
3. *Old services, new users.* A difficult area because of lack of experience in dealing with the users, hence the possibility that service providers are not aware of their characteristics, needs, and interests.
4. *New services, new users.* The most difficult area of all because of lack of knowledge of the users' experiences with the product.

Major Relevant Marketing Concepts

In seeking to apply marketing concepts to counseling, it may be helpful to select the major ideas that offer the most promise for strengthening counseling in the human services.

1. The single most important factor contributing to new product service success is product/service *uniqueness* and *superiority*. The competition for services now offered by CP&P centers demands that they identify how their service is unique and why it is superior to the others.
2. It is crucial in a marketing approach to know your audience and potential consumers and their needs.
3. Product myopia occurs when an organization focuses on the product or service rather than on the needs that the product or service addresses. The best illustration of this from the counseling field is the continual priority that helping professionals give to individual counseling, while the public—students, adults or other clients—consistently downgrade its importance.
4. The success of organizations in developing new products and services is a function not of the amount of money put into research and development, but rather of managerial skills and expertise in marketing programs and services.
5. It is important from a marketing standpoint to use the service life cycle in anticipating and planning for both problems and opportunities. CP&P centers must continuously monitor changes in population subgroups that indicate different needs and interests, and make appropriate changes in how they present, prescribe, and provide counseling.
6. Synergistic interface is a concept of combining a stable product or service with new information or a high technology change. A clear example of this may be the application of computer-assisted career guidance to career guidance services.
7. A successful marketing plan is geared to developing new markets and new users.

A Marketing List for Counselors

The following are six specific recommendations and/or actions for enhancing the image of CP&P services and increasing their use by potential publics.

1. Adopt a positive attitude toward the use of marketing concepts and strategies in more effectively disseminating CP&P services.
2. Define what excellence and quality are in career counseling and placement services.
3. Develop an appropriate marketing strategy for each stage of development.
4. Make a strong and ongoing commitment toward the research and development of new programs and practices.
5. Maximize the building of synergistic interfaces.
6. Regularly and systematically assess user and potential user needs and interests.

Conclusion

The career planning and placement specialist must become a marketeer—versed in and committed to the use of marketing concepts and tools to improve the quality and extend the use by clients of career planning and placement programs and services. The ideas presented here can be adopted and adapted by a center to develop its own customized program. Adopting a marketeer orientation to CP&P programs furnishes the central focus on which to base realistic and realizable goals and priorities.

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